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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of two academic achievement courses in improving quality point averages (QPAs) of educationally disadvantaged students was compared. One of the voluntary study skills courses taught specific study skills (study orientation skills--SOS), while the other purported to teach students to think like achievers (achievement motivation training--AMT). The 6-week AMT involved 4 to 8 participants, who were encouraged to use achievement imagery in telling stories. Additional components focused on test-taking behavior, study habits, time budgeting, values examination, and goal setting. The semester-long SOS involved 6 to 15 participants and included the specific academic skills of test taking, time management, note taking, listening, textbook reading, study improvement, and paper and report writing. SOS also included training in supportive academic skills, goal setting, and examination of personal motivators. Of the 78 students, 18 enrolled only in the AMT, 14 participated only in SOS, 24 took both courses concurrently, while 22 who had taken SOS in a prior semester chose to take AMT. No significant differences in academic achievement occurred for students who took either of the courses or both, although AMT participants had the highest mean ranks. (SW)

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THE DISADVANTAGED COLLEGE STUDENT AND STUDY SKILLS COURSES

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Abstract

Two academic skills courses were offered to participants in a program for disadvantaged college students. Examination of academic achievement among the students enrolled in the voluntary study skills courses was done to aid program staff in improving future program planning and individual scheduling of students. The primary focus of course A was to teach specific study skills, while course B purported to teach students to think like achievers, although both courses contained academic skills, motivation, and goal setting components. Some students took course A or course B, others took both courses concurrently, while some who had taken course A in a previous semester took course B. Adjusted QPAs for the semester of the study were examined for the four conditions using the Kruskal-Wallis procedure. Results were not significant at the .05 level. There were only slight differences in the mean ranks among the four conditions, although students who took course B, with its emphasis on achievement motivation, showed the highest mean ranks.

THE DISADVANTAGED COLLEGE STUDENT AND STUDY SKILLS COURSES

Despite the popularity of study skills courses for college students, the comparative efficacy of such courses rarely has been examined. For the most part, comparison of academic improvement courses usually consists of an eximination of the results of such a course when given with and without some additional component. For example, Pauk (1965) compared a study skills course with the same course with a reading component. Johnson (1974) reported a comparison of a study skills group and a similarly exposed group with the additional provision of desensitization. In most instances, however, study skills courses are evaluated individually by examination of improvement in quality point average (QPA) of students who have taken a particular study skill course.

Although in Entwisle and Entwisle's (1970) examination of courses which improved student grades the content of these courses was found to vary, the teaching of some basic study skills, such as note taking and test taking were common to study skills programs. Many courses have been designed with adjunct components, such as reading skills (Pauk, 1965), desensitization (Johnson, 1974), and counseling (Speilburger and Weitz, 1964).

The number of hours a student spends in the study skills class also has been examined. Programs lasting more than 10 hours, according to Bednar and Weinburg (1970), reportedly are the most successful. Soeilburger and Weitz (1964) contend that in counseling approaches to study skills, the longer the participation, the greater the improvement.

College credit, according to Blake (1955) is the strongest motivating force in the achievement of study skills. The utility of the material used

in study skills courses also has been found to be important, for it is easier to remember and use material which is meaningful (Florey and Scroggins, note 1). Additionally, Entwisle and Entwisle (1970) and Bednar Weinburg (1970) found that students who volunteered for study skills courses made greater gains than students who were required to participate.

Special Services for Disadvantaged Students (SSDS) is a federally supported program to provide academic assistance to disadvantaged students at The University of Alabama. SSDS is mandated to offer disadvantaged students experiences to enhance their academic achievement (Smith, note 3). There is no requirement that any of the educational activities provided be statistically evaluated; the program reports only demographic data such as number, sex, and race of students associated with it. Thus, there was little comparative examination of any of the learning activities of the program to determine their contribution to the students' academic achievement. Comparison of the effectiveness of two achievement oriented courses used with the program's special population could result in improved program planning and individual scheduling of students.

The SSDS program provides a variety of services, such as counseling, tutoring, and special classes including reading and academic skills training to enhance academic achievement of disadvantaged students from the time they enter The University of Alabama (Smith, note 3). University credit is offered for participation in up to three semester hours of the special classes, called GS 111. The staff has tried several innovations in providing the experience of academic skills training. Initially, this component of the SSDS program was taught in a classroom lecture, but the spring semester of 1979, small group format was introduced and is used at present.

The purpose of this study was to examine and compare the effectiveness of two academic achievement courses in improving the QPAs of participating

disadvantaged students. The researcher believed that there would be a significant difference in the QPAs of students who took the two study skills courses, and wished to know from which course they showed the highest QPAs.

Method

Subjects

Subjects in the study were 78 university undergraduates in a voluntary program for educationally disadvantaged students. The participants received academic credit for participation. Although 96 students were enrolled in the program, only 79 elected to take the courses under study, and one of these withdrew from school. Of the 78 subjects, 18 students enrolled only in AMT, 14 participated only in SOS, 24 took both courses concurrently, while 22 who had taken SOS in a prior semester chose to take AMT.

Procedure

Achievement Motivation Training (AMT), designed by Markle, Rinn, and Worthy (1977), was added to the SSDS program in the spring of 1980. The brief, six weeks long small group (4 to 8 participants) program is based on McClelland's (1973) work in human motivation, and is designed. according to its authors, to enhance the academic achievement of underachievers by teaching them to think like achievers by learning to tell stories using achievement imagery based on simple sketches presented in a workbook. The course includes lectures and exercises in goal setting and attainment, contracting for and recording of study time, classroom, study, and test taking behavior, examination of values, and time budgeting.

Study Orientation Skills (SOS) is a semester-long course designed by Florey and Scroggins (note 1), and utilizes a small group format (6 to 15 members). In this course, the students use a workbook which emphasizes the specific academic skills of test taking, time management, note taking and

listening, textbook reading and study improvement, and paper and report writing. The workbook offers training and practice in supportive academic skills and goal setting, and provides a guided examination of personal motivators.

The content similarities of the two programs are obvious. As for the differences between the courses, although both require an hour and a half for each session, AMT meets in a very small group for about half a semester, while SOS meets in a larger small group for an entire semester. AMT is supposed mainly to teach participants to think like achievers, an art which carries over into other aspects of life than the academic, while SOS has the primary focus of teaching specific skills needed for study. Both courses require student workbooks and leader's manuals, and SOS uses posters related to topics studied. Both are conducted by trained counselors, who in this study were master's level counselors who worked as graduate assistants in the SSDS program.

A transcript was obtained for each subject from the university's records office at the end of the semester. The QPAs of the semester of interest were adjusted by subtracting the hours and quality points for GS 111 and recomputing the QPAs in order to eliminate the possibility of grade inflation as a result of the high grades in GS 111 having an effect on the results.

Results

Participants' adjusted QPAs for the semester of enrollment in one or both courses were examined for the four conditions using the Kruskal-Wallis procedure. The results were not significant at the .05 level, which may be interpreted as insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis that there would be no significant difference in the academic achievement of students who took either of the courses or both of the courses, either separately or concurrently. Further examination of the results revealed that students taking only AMT, with its focus on motivation and its small group format, showed the highest mean

rank, while students enrolled in AMT and SOS at the same time showed the lowest mean rank among the groups studied. These results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Kruskal-Wallis One-Way Anova

Total number of subjects: 78				
Group	SOS	AMT	Concurrent SOS & AMT	AMT with previous SOS
Number	14	18	24	22
Mean rank	40.93	43.44	34.50	40.82

Chi Square (corrected for ties): 1.855 Level of significance: .603

Conclusions

The study indicates that neither study skills course had more influence on the ranking of student grades than the other, individually or in combination. The effectiveness of the individual courses in fulfilling their purpose, which is, ultimately, the improvement of grades; the students' adoption and use of the skills and principles taught in these courses; and the effectiveness of the individual study skills courses versus no special assistance in improving grades are subjects for further examination. Grades from subsequent semesters should be examined to determine if there is some late-appearing consequence of the courses. If a choice should be made between AMT and SOS, the length of the courses and the number of students who can be taught in each session are factors to be considered.

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